

Great Archaeological Sites in Bridgend



5. CROSS AT ALL SAINTS CHURCH, PEN-Y-FAI



All Saints Church at Pen-y-fai, just to the north-west of Bridgend (SS 8934 8182), was built at the very beginning of the 20th century by local landowner Robert Llewellyn on a greenfield site, and is not the sort of place you would expect to find a medieval treasure. On the sloping grass in front of the church is a rather unimpressive-looking churchyard cross, made up of various pieces of stone that do not match very well. But if you have a good look at its head, you will be surprised. Unlike the rest, this is a genuine piece of medieval sculpture. On one side is the usual carving of Christ on the cross flanked by the Virgin Mary and St John. On the other is a bishop wearing his mitre and carrying the other symbol of his office, his crozier, in his left hand whilst in his right he holds a chain with fetters.

St Leonard was a Frankish saint who died in AD559. According to legend he was a noble at the court of King Clove I. When the king and all his court (including Leonard) were converted to Christianity, he is said to have asked the king for the right to liberate at any time all prisoners he felt were worthy of freedom. This is why he has a chain and fetters as his symbol. On our carving, the chain is medieval but the original fetters in the carving had disappeared so they had to be added again when it was attached to this cross. St Leonard became the patron saint of prisoners and women in labour, and he became especially popular in the 11th century.

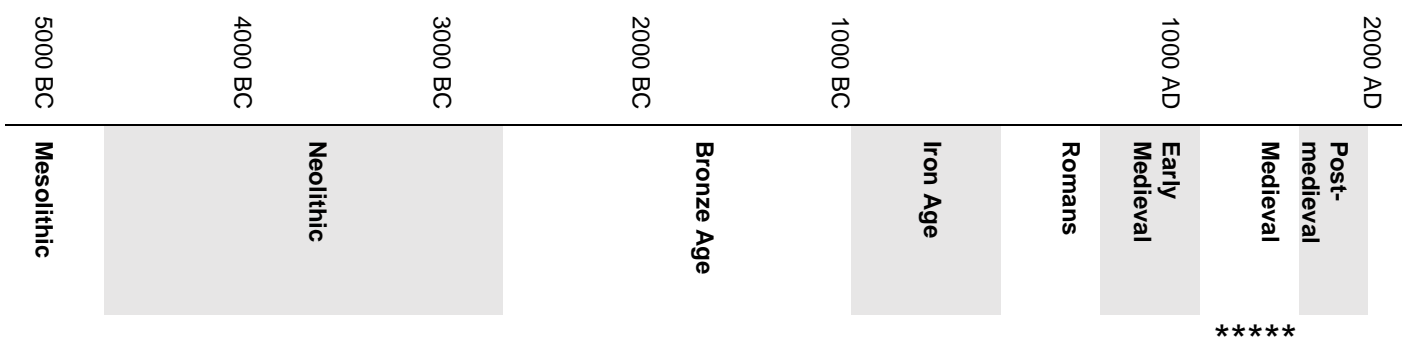
This sculpture came to the church from Ty Mawr farmhouse where it had been kept. But originally it must have been the head of the medieval churchyard cross at the parish church of Newcastle in Bridgend. We know from documents that when the

Normans built a church there they dedicated it to St Leonard. St Leonard's day is 6th November. The church at Newcastle is now dedicated to St Illtyd, whose day is also 6th November. We do not know when the dedication changed although we know it was before 1860. The reason was probably because influential people in the parish thought that it ought to have a Celtic dedication, and perhaps thought that the Normans had changed a pre-existing dedication from St Illtyd to St Leonard in order to keep the mabsaint – the parish saint's day – the same.



All Saints Church is on Protheroe Ave, Bridgend (CF31 4LU). Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 170, Explorer Series sheet 151.

Timeline (the asterisk indicate the possible time-span)



You can learn more about this site, and other similar archaeological sites in Wales, by going to <https://www.archwilio.org.uk/arch/>. Please read and observe the Conditions of Use. The cross head has the PRN (Primary Record Number) 00183m, and you can search for other similar sites here too. You can contact us via social media or through the methods given at the bottom of the page. See more about our Christian sites at http://www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/historic_christian/pages/index.html